United Nations

Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ Secretary-General "deeply dismayed" over attack on United Nations convoy yesterday in Sarajevo; calls humanitarian situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina "desperate" and appeals for the urgent implementation of agreement to reopen airport.

+ Secretary-General's Special Representative for Western Sahara, S. Yaqub-Khan, meets in Geneva with delegation of POLISARIO for talks on reactivating peace plan for that Territory.

+ At the Earth Summit in Rio, last minute negotiations continue to resolve remaining issues, before the beginning tomorrow of the largest ever gathering of world leaders; Convention on Biological Diversity enters into force.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in a statement issued today in Rio de Janeiro, expressed his concern that the accord on the opening of Sarajevo airport had not yet been implemented. "The humanitarian situation is reaching a stage which can only be characterized as desperate", he warned. He said he was "deeply dismayed" that the United Nations vehicles had been fired on last night and that their mobility had been impeded by mines and other barriers, "despite explicit guarantees of safe passage by all sides".

"A heavy responsibility weighs on the leaders of all parties involved in this conflict, and especially upon those who disregard humanitarian considerations or deliberately stand in the way of a political settlement", he said. He called on all the parties involved to implement the airport accord, saying it would facilitate the resumption of efforts towards a political settlement in Bosnia and Herzegovina within the Conference on Yugoslavia. The reactivation of the political process on a continued basis was the only way out of the present "senseless bloodshed and destruction".

He reminded the parties concerned that "membership in the United Nations requires adherence to the Principles of the Charter and the most fundamental humanitarian laws that the international community expects nations to respect".

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For information media—not an official record

The United Nations convoy from Belgrade carrying a group of military observers, which was fired upon last night as it approached Sarajevo and forced to turn back, today entered the city and reached the headquarters of the United Nations Protection Force in Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR). The group includes 66 members of the advance team that is to assess the possibility of securing Sarajevo airport, so that it can open to flights of humanitarian nature for the city and other areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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The Secretary-General's Special Representative for Western Sahara, S. Yaqub-Khan, met this morning in Geneva at the Palais des Nations with a delegation from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO).

According to a press communiqué issued in Geneva today, Mr. Yaqub-Khan described the discussions as "friendly and constructive" and said that he would be meeting with the delegation again tomorrow morning.

The meeting was in the context of current efforts to reactivate the settlement plan for self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. Mr. Khan is scheduled to travel to Morocco on Sunday for talks with the Moroccan side, and will then go to Tindouf, in Algeria, where he will meet again with POLISARIO representatives. He intends to return to New York on 21 June, where he will hold further talks with both sides.

The Security Council last week endorsed a recommendation by the Secretary-General that the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) be extended until the end of August. By then, he said, if the peace process remained deadlocked, in spite of the ongoing talks with the parties involved, the Council might consider taking a different approach to resolving the conflict.

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Last minute negotiations continued today to resolve some delicate issues before the beginning of the largest ever gathering of world leaders to be held tomorrow, 12 June, at the United Nations Environment and Development Conference in Rio. One hundred and eighteen Heads of State and Government are expected to attend the two-day summit.

According to reports from Rio, the Main Committee met from Wednesday until dawn today to finalize agreement. The remaining issues will be taken up at the Ministerial level. One of the major areas of controversy is official development assistance (ODA). The problem is for developed countries to meet the United Nation target of 0.7 per cent of the gross national product for official development assistance.

Among other issues to be resolved were the global environment facility, one of the mechanisms for funding Agenda 21 -- a blueprint for action for the sustainable development of planet Earth into the twenty-first century. There

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was also disagreement over the possible negotiation of a future legal instrument on forests, as well as on a paragraph referring to national trade in foreign forests from sustainably managed forest resources, which is opposed by Asian and African countries.

Agreements reached so far concern freshwater resources, biological diversity, biotechnology and transfer of enviromentally safe and sound technology, although all references to "safe" remain unresolved.

In a separate development, 31 countries had signed by Tuesday the Convention on Biological Diversity. The document has thus entered into force despite the controversy that has surrounded it. It had required just 30 nations to ratify, accept, approve or acceed to it.

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change requires at least 50 signatories. It had also been signed by 31 countries. Both instruments were opened for signature last week.

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